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"DULY AND TRULY PREPARED"

There are many who think that we are making Masons too fast, without due regard as to the quality of the men who seek the fellowship of our Fraternity, and that the itch for numbers may easily result in permanent injury to the Order. No committee can be appointed by a Lodge whose action is more vital to the interests of the Order than a committee investigating a petitioner for the Degrees. Such a committee deals with the sources of the stream from which our Masonic life flows, and if they permit that stream to be polluted the results are far-reaching and hard to undo. The feeling grows that we do not make the investigation thorough enough, and that committees appointed to this task are not sufficiently instructed as to their duties and responsibilities – especially so in larger cities where intimate knowledge of men is more difficult than it is in the smaller communities.

Happily there are signs of an awakening to the seriousness of this matter, and a tendency to make the investigation more thorough, while furnishing more specific guidance to committees. For example, the Grand Lodge of New Jersey has formulated a "Statement of the Petitioner" to accompany his petition to the Lodge, giving, first, as a means of simple identification, his name, residence, business, date and place of birth, name of parents and brothers and sisters, how long he has lived in the United States, in the State, and in the city. Then follow certain other questions, as follows: Where did you attend school? At what age did you leave school? Give names and addresses of your employers for the past ten years, and the periods and nature of your several employments. Are you married? How long? Have you any children? How many ? If married, are you living with your wife? If not living with your wife, state reasons for separation ? What provision have you made for yourself or your family in case of disability or death? Have you ever been a defendant in a criminal case; if so state circumstances and result? Do you contribute to charity so far as your circumstances will permit ? How long have you been acquainted with your proposers, personally? Give names and addresses of three responsible persons, Masons preferred, who have known you the most intimately for the longest time.

Some of these questions may seem strange at first sight, but a little reflection will show that they are not only pertinent but important. While lack of education may be no bar to living the Masonic life, nor an education, however extended, be a guarantee that a man is leading or will lead such a life, none the less it is a matter that may well be taken into account. Nor will any man whose record is good object to giving a full account of his employment - he will rather be glad to do so - and at the same time the Lodge ought to know whether he can afford the necessary expense entailed in joining a Masonic Lodge, without using funds needed for himself or family in case of illness or misfortune. In the same way, the query about his home-life, or lack of it, allows a man not living with his wife an opportunity to explain the reasons with more fairness and justice than if the Lodge, or some member of it, merely knew the fact; and the same argument applies with equal force to the matter of criminal action. Often enough, as we all know, there is a natural and reasonable explanation for what looks bad on the surface. Similarly, if a man is able to practice charity, and refuses or neglects to do so, we may well hesitate to

admit him to the fellowship of an Order one of whose corner stones is Charity. The other questions are also important, and if a man is his own employer he will surely not object, if he be worthy, to giving the names of men who have known him a long time who can vouch for his character and good report. Some of these questions will not seem necessary in all cases, yet they can do no harm, and may be of advantage in helping the Lodge to determine whether a man is "duly and truly prepared."

All these inquiries assume, and rightly so, that Masonry is not a reformatory or a moral infirmary, nor yet a distinctively charitable Order - albeit practicing charity in myriad ways - but a Fraternity mobilizing men of character, intelligence and goodwill for the service of humanity; and as such it must guard itself, so far as is humanly possible, alike from moral unworthiness and mere prying curiosity. It does not solicit members, save in so far as the quality of its men and its influence in a community may invite the cooperation of men of like sort, who wish to foster what is noblest in humanity. Therefore, if it is to fulfill its mission, it must have a care for quality as well as for quantity, the more so in a day when it is highly esteemed, and when men throng its temple gates seeking its ancient and honorable fellowship.